

Message from the chair



Chris Dadds

When I joined the Committee a few years ago it was for a couple of reasons; not just the opportunity to get out of the office on a Friday (nor the chance to then have to catch up on a Friday night with what I've missed by being out of the office), rather it was about trying to put something back and help shape the actions of the Region and the way in which the profession is seen more widely.

The problem with all of this aspirational stuff is, as you will all know, the real world invariably gets in the way and we end up bogged down in what we're doing, not necessarily why. We also often end up concerned more about the journey than the destination.

When the RTPI asks its members what they want the organisation to be doing, the most significant response relates to the perception of the profession in the wider world. The fact that, when "Planning" is mentioned in the press, it is inevitably someone from RICS or CPRE who are quoted, not someone from RTPI. Somewhere along the way planners get associated with process, not with outcomes and therefore we are seen in that light and our important input into the final solutions seems somewhere to be overlooked.

Nationally, the RTPI has sought, fairly successfully, to promote our profile more widely with an increasing range of quotes in the national press and also in items on national radio. However, Rome

wasn't, as they say, built in a day but we are moving in the right direction and the profile is hopefully rising slowly and sometimes this is without even mention of RTPI or planners but just the press putting across the points of view that planner might support following briefings.

In the Region we have always been seen by members as a provider of conferences, which have been, and hopefully will continue to be, excellent mediums for the exchange of good practice and experience. They are, therefore, an opportunity to lift our heads from "the day job" and think more widely about why we do what we do and, hopefully, better ways of doing it.

Conferences are very popular with an average attendance last year of 100 delegates. As this year's Chair the responsibility falls to me to make sure that they continue to be successful and thought provoking. Hopefully, we'll be able to do this - the question then is what else should the RTPI be doing in the region?

The Committee has always sought to comment upon major consultations and White Papers and most recently, at the January Conference, Matthew Taylor MP made a presentation about the Review on Rural Economy and Affordable Housing which he is leading and you will see a report of the conference in the following pages.

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Bristol planner to race rickshaw across India for charity

Floods, engine failure, running repairs, crazy drivers and the wonderful randomness of India... Planner Sharon Jefferies is expecting to tackle them all when she races a rickshaw this summer for charity. With no support crew, a rickety rickshaw and only a couple of spanners for backup, this will certainly be no holiday.

Jefferies, a planning consultant at Bristol's Baker Associates, and fellow driver Joanna Penny, hope to raise over £2000 for charities Mercy Corps and Frank Water. The race, which starts on 1st June 2008, runs from Kathmandu in Nepal to South India, following a 4,000km route across mountains, jungle and open roads. Just to add to the challenge, this full-on road trip will take place in the middle of the monsoon. Sharon and Joanna will be the only all-girl team competing against 70 other auto-rickshaws.



The Charities

Mercy Corps works with local non-governmental organisations on some amazing projects to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive, and just communities.

Frank Water is an independent, bottled spring water company. Every one litre of FRANK spring water bought in the UK helps fund 200 litres of clean, safe, drinking water for villagers at the FRANK projects in India and Africa.

If you'd like to support the trip by donating to these two fantastic charities, please visit:

www.willwemakeit.com/loonylassis

Notes

Sharon Jefferies and Joanna Penny can be contacted on: E-mail: loonylassis@yahoo.co.uk

Web site: www.rickshawrun.com/loonylassis

Donate money at: www.willwemakeit.com/loonylassis

While they're away, you can visit the girls' website at: www.rickshawrun.com/loonylassis



Stephen Crow Former Chief Planning Inspector



Many of you will be aware that the former Chief Planning Inspector, Professor Stephen Crow died suddenly before Christmas.

Stephen came to national attention for the 1999 South East Plan before chairing the Casino Advisory Panel and only recently reporting on the East Midlands RSS. He was known to many in the South West from his chairing of the Devon and Cornwall EiP's in 2003, and through his association with Cardiff University (which isn't in the South West) as well as UWE's Class of '94 to whom he presented their degrees.

Stephen had an expansive knowledge of all things planning, train related, Russian ... well most things really. His patience, guidance and development of those new to the profession was greatly appreciated and many of us are better planners because of Stephen's influence. He helped instil a sense of rigour, questioning but most importantly enthusiasm for planning in all who had the pleasure of working with him.

He will be greatly missed.

Kath Haddrell and Susannah Guest, PINS

DIARY

Friday 25th April 2008

Planning & Transport.
Venue: The Guildhall, Bath

Friday 16th May 2008

Development Management.
Venue: Burges Salmon Offices, Bristol

Wednesday 21st May 2008

Planning Support Staff Training.
Venue: The Brewhouse, Taunton

Friday 20th June 2008

All Quiet on the Weston Front.
Venue: The Wingerd gardens, Weston Super Mare (flier enclosed)

Thursday 3rd July 2008

A 4 course dinner at the Thistle Hotel, Exeter to celebrate 60 years of planning with after dinner speaker, Rob Cowan, Urban Design Skills.
Venue: The Thistle Hotel, Exeter (flier enclosed)

Friday 4th July 2008

1948-2008 – How Far have we come?
Venue: The Thistle Hotel, Exeter (flier enclosed)

In this edition:

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- 8 Editors Report, Diary Dates



All contributions for Branchout to:

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The deadline for the next edition is **20th June 2008**.

The Royal Town Planning Institute is a registered charity in England and Wales No 262865 Registered Office: 41 Botolph Lane, London EC3R 8DL.

Message from the chair continued

We took the opportunity to get Matthew and his team to attend the event in order that members of the RTPI could directly input to the ongoing review on topics which they obviously have much experience. The discussions will also form the basis of a response by the Region to the Review.

There is however a problem for the Region in being seen more often providing opinions and this basically is that we all have day jobs. To date the RTPI SW only employs one person, Helen Clarke our administrator. As a result when there are topics or issues to be commented upon it falls to the same old group to fit it in around the day job, as long as there's no conflict of interest.

This is, or has been, just the nature of it to date. However, we are trying to change this and many of you will have seen adverts in the planning press seeking a Regional Policy Officer to support the Region. The point of this is to give a focus for our contribution to debates and provide a single point of contact for press, as well as the providing a link to the policy officers in Botolph Lane.

We're looking to appoint someone in March. Hopefully it will mean in the future you will see more from the RTPI in the region as we are able to more readily contribute to the debate. Therefore ensuring that the view of planners, and our important role in the shaping of places, is made clear.

If there are other things that you think the RTPI SW could and/or should be doing, we'd like to hear about it. Obviously we only have so much money and so much time but any sensible suggestions will be considered. Contact us via the website at www.rtpi.org.uk.

Chris Dadds

sponsored by White Young Green

Tiverton Pannier Market Enhancement Scheme - Submitted by Mid Devon District Council
Best entry in 'Schemes on the Ground' category and overall winner of the Philip Barclay Silver Cup

Crediton: Regeneration in a Conservation Area - Submitted by Mid Devon District Council
Commended in the 'Schemes on the Ground' category

Priory Gardens heritage regeneration project, Gloucester - Submitted by Gloucester City Council
Commended in the 'Schemes on the Ground' category

Mid Devon District Council Supplementary Planning Guidance - The Provision & Funding of Open Space through Development - Submitted by Mid Devon District Council
Commended in the 'other planning work' category

Gloucester Quays - regeneration scheme planning process - Submitted by White Young Green
Commended and best entry in the 'other planning work' category

Gloucester Regeneration Framework - Submitted by Terence O'Rourke Ltd
Commended in the 'other planning work' category

Devon Strategic Housing Group - Affordable Housing Master Class - Submitted by the Devon Strategic Housing Group
Commended in the 'other planning work' category

Somerset County Council - New Monitoring Fees Regime for Mineral and Landfill Permissions - Submitted by Somerset County Council
Commended in the 'other planning work' category

Awards presentations

Framed certificates for all entries and, to the overall winner, the Silver Cup and commemorative plaque, was presented at a special event in Tiverton on 3 March 2008, to which representatives of all those submitting entries were invited. A full write on the entries including the Award Ceremony will be published in the next edition of Branchout.

Geoff Walker UWE

THE RTPI PLANNING AWARDS FOR 2008: Closing date Monday 31st March

Details of the 2008 national planning awards will shortly appear on the website www.rtpi.org.uk under Events, Awards and Networking. This year all entrants will be encouraged to submit entries online and clear instructions will be given. The full list of awards and categories is as follows:

Sustainable Communities
Town Regeneration
Rural Areas and the Natural Environment
Arts Culture Sport
Spatial Strategies
E-Government

City and Metropolitan Regions
Renewed Neighbourhoods
Heritage
Climate Change
Planning Process
Equality and Diversity

And additionally the judges may identify other categories once they have received the entries. And don't forget all entries will automatically be entered free of charge for your own Regional Award. For more details on all the Institute's awards please contact awards@rtpi.org.uk

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National Association for Planning Enforcement (NAPE):
Planning Enforcement is an important and distinct function within the planning process. Enforcement staff require unique skills and competencies to ensure the effective and successful resolution of the many issues encompassed by planning enforcement. The National Association for Planning Enforcement (NAPE) acts as a representative body, promoting and supporting local and regional activity and encouraging the sharing of good practice. Website www.rtpi.org.uk or from nape@rtpi.org.uk

Planning with Communities Network:
Planning can help to empower people at all levels. Community involvement is now rightly at the centre of ensuring that communities are developed and renewed sustainably. The Planning with Communities Network ensures the widest and most influential dissemination of effective community planning practice, alongside the work of the RTPI's Planning Aid Service and Community Planning Project. Website: www.rtpi.org.uk or from communities@rtpi.org.uk

Politicians in Planning Network (PIPA):
Planning can often be contentious and may involve making difficult decisions to benefit future generations. The only decisions that have the necessary legitimacy are those taken through the democratic political process. This is why the RTPI has developed PIPA, recognising that planning is and must be a democratic process, supported by professional and technical expertise. Website www.rtpi.org.uk or from pipa@rtpi.org.uk

Rural Planning Network:
There has been significant change within the rural sector, impacting greatly on the way planners address rural matters. Rural planning issues need to be fully understood by all those involved in the planning process and it is essential that these issues are not treated in isolation. The Network brings together individuals who work in rural areas and those who have an interest or involvement in rural planning. Website: www.rtpi.org.uk or from rural.planning@rtpi.org.uk

Transport Planning Network:
In response to the need for more effective integration, the Transport Planning Network was set up as a joint initiative between the RTPI and the Transport Planning Society (TPS) to build new links across boundaries with the planning profession. The Network provides a useful focus for spatial planners, transport planners, urbanists, environmentalists, regeneration professionals and all those interested and/or involved in transport matters who wish to gain access to information and to benefit from networking opportunities with other professionals. Website: www.rtpi.org.uk or from transport@rtpi.org.uk

Urban Design Network:
The Urban Design Network aims to enable planners to rise to the challenge of realising opportunities to achieve a more integrated approach between urban design and planning. By joining the Network, RTPI members and other urban design practitioners can work towards the achievement of good urban design together, taking a shared approach. The Network is a forum for discussing problems, finding solutions and identifying opportunities. Website: www.rtpi.org.uk or from urban.design@rtpi.org.uk

Young Planners' Network:
The Network, a virtual community of students, licentiate and younger Corporate Members (under 35), has links with regional young planners' groups and aims to play a key role in supporting, raising the profile and developing the professional competence of students and young professional planners. It acts as a voice for all young planners in the RTPI. The Network promotes the contribution made by students and young planners to the planning profession, and helps raise the profile of tomorrow's young planners. Website: www.rtpi.org.uk or from young.planners@rtpi.org.uk

WORKSHOP FOR PLANNING SUPPORT STAFF

Readers are invited to draw the attention of their technical and administrative colleagues to two free half day workshops being run by RTPI SW during 2008. Organised with the cooperation of the Devon Technical Officers Group, they are scheduled for 21st May in Taunton and 19th November in Plymouth, both afternoon sessions. At the workshops issues of particular relevance to the work of planning technicians and administrators will be examined, in particular recent and proposed changes in planning legislation and advice. They will also provide opportunities for these key members of staff from around the South West to meet and exchange experiences in a similar manner to their planning professional colleagues at the regular RTPI SW conferences. The delegate numbers will be limited to about fifty. Further details of the workshops will be circulated directly to local authority planning departments and planning consultancies.

To book a place now delegates should contact the **RTPI SW Administrator, Helen Clarke**
email: southwest@rtpi.org.uk or
Tel 01823 250822.

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...a range of housing templates providing choice of size and character to meet local circumstances and needs. Lee Bray (South Hams) spoke for many of the planners in the audience when he suggested that the task of securing affordable housing was becoming increasingly difficult. He expressed worries that the RSS emphasis on the city regions had not helped as there was scope in rural areas for affordable housing. Politicians in his own Authority set the bar high in seeking a 66% target for schemes of greater than 15 units although now it has a sliding scale that even seeks contributions when one house is permitted. The Authority has been promoting the idea of community concept plans as a means of identifying "exception" affordable housing sites although often the public see no further than the plan; they forget to read the words. Lee described the processes involved in promoting the Sherford new community and the role played by planners and designers. He summarised his thoughts on what is required by planners in the public sector to secure affordable housing, namely strong political leadership, professional commitment, clear and consistent purpose, effective community partnership, clear and frequent communication, be open to change and improvements and resistance to ridicule.

Finally Alan Fox described the founding and operation of the Community Land Trust (CLT) in Cornwall. Based on concepts from Scotland and the USA CLTs provided several benefits, including; close community involvement; use of pre-emptive agreements to control the values and occupation of affordable housing; consistent consultation at the pre-planning stage; securing consistency of open market valuations; and developing a "track record" for delivery and trust.

The delegates would have left with greater insight into the issues confronting the provision of affordable housing although whether it makes the task any easier is doubtful.

The RTPI Networks and Associations provide a voice for everyone with an interest in the planning profession. They help to raise the profile of the planning profession and play a key role in engagement and communication with members and other professionals working in planning and related fields. The Networks and Associations have a strong track record of generating, demonstrating and disseminating knowledge and good practice. Network members help each other by responding rapidly to requests for information and advice on their specialist topics.

The Networks and Associations are 'virtual' communities, but members also meet face-to-face at events and conferences as well as receiving regular email bulletins with all the latest news and information.

Please find listed below details of each of the Networks - membership of these networks is open to everyone with an interest in any aspect of spatial planning. Membership is free to RTPI members.

Development Management Network:

Development Management is at the frontline of planning and employs many thousands of planners in both the public and private sectors. Development management is subject to constant changes and incessant challenges, with increasing levels of expectation from the general public, developers and Government. The Development Management Network is a forum for discussing problems, finding solutions and identifying opportunities.

Website: www.rtpi.org.uk or from development.management@rtpi.org.uk.

Development Planning Network:

Development Planning is also at the heart of planning activity. The ongoing planning reforms in the UK and Ireland and the subsequent raft of supporting guidance has resulted in significant changes to the development planning system. This is an extremely challenging and exciting time for development planners. Website: www.rtpi.org.uk or from development.planning@rtpi.org.uk

Environmental Planning and Protection Network:

The environmental agenda is never far from the thoughts of planners. Over the years concerns have changed from wildlife, landscape and pollution issues, to a much wider consideration of short and long-term impacts on the human environment. The development of sustainable communities involves hard choices and trade-offs between jobs, social impacts, health impacts and impacts on the natural and physical environment. These create many new tensions and are increasingly open to public review. The Environmental Planning and Protection Network aims to enable its members to make better informed decisions on these key issues. Website: www.rtpi.org.uk or from epp@rtpi.org.uk

Independent Consultants' Network:

The Network aims to reflect the interests and concerns of self-employed consultants and consultants working in small practices by providing a forum where members can discuss relevant issues and share good practice. The Network also plays a key role in supporting, raising the profile and enhancing the professional competences of independent planning consultants. Website: www.rtpi.org.uk or from icn@rtpi.org.uk.

International Development Network:

The 1996 UN Habitat Agenda identified adequate shelter for all and more sustainable human settlements as priorities. Global issues, particularly climate change, call for action based on sound spatial planning principles. Fears of urban unrest place a focus on inclusive planning processes in all parts of the world. So all countries – regardless of their level of development – need a spatially coherent approach to environmental protection, investment and economic development, designation of areas for growth and provision of infrastructure. This Network is for everyone with an interest in these international issues. Website: www.rtpi.org.uk or from ids@rtpi.org.uk

RTPI South West Student Awards for academic year 2006/2007:

RTPI South West Prize for postgraduate work making the best contribution to planning practice (based on the Masters Dissertation) - **Awarded to Jack Cook** (MA Town & Country Planning)

RTPI South West Prize for the best contribution to the planning profession, based on the Agency Project - **Awarded jointly to Surinder Jandor** (BA Hons Architecture & Planning) and **Jemma Cam** (Master of Planning)

RTPI South West Urban Design Prize for the best performance on the MA Urban Design course - **Not awarded this year**

RTPI National Student Awards for academic year 2006/2007:

National Prize for the best overall performance on the Master of Planning (MPlan) Course - **Lauren Cook**

National Prize for the best overall performance on the MA Town & Country Planning Course - **Sam Metson**

National Prize for the best overall performance on the BA (Hons) Architecture & Planning Course – **Thomas Bulmer**

National Prize for the best overall performance on the Joint Distance Learning MA Town & Country Planning Course – **Martin Whelan**

The Awards Ceremony took place on Monday 26 November in Bristol Cathedral at which Steve Atkinson presented the South West Awards. Congratulations to all the prize winners.

Geoff Walker UWE



Back Row L-R Jack Cook, Sam Metson, Steve Atkinson (RTPI SW Chair 2007), Martin Whelan, Thomas Bulmer

Front Row L-R Lauren Cook, Surinder Jandor, Jemma Cam



RTPI Young Planner of the Year Congratulations to Susannah Guest,

Senior Planning Officer at the Planning Inspectorate who has won the RTPI Young Planner of the Year Award 2007. Her award was presented at a ceremony at London's Hilton Hotel on Thursday 7th February.

Part of Susannah's prize is attendance at the APA conference in Las Vegas this year with all expenses and accommodation paid for. The prize also includes a free place at the Planning Summer School in September when she will be asked to give a presentation of her experiences at the Conference.

The Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration: What's in a name?

Quite a lot for anyone involved or interested in the process of regional planning in England. In this, the second of my articles on the theme of yet more change for planners in the South West, I will look at the proposals stemming from this Treasury instigated review. Under these, Regional Assemblies will cease to be the planning bodies responsible for preparing Regional Spatial Strategies and instead the process will be taken over by the Regional Development Agencies who will be responsible for the planning, transport and housing functions and for producing new 'Single Regional Strategies' incorporating spatial and economic policy. Consultation appears to have been minimal, yet the change will require new primary legislation. It will also mean that government appointed bodies, answerable to central government departments, rather than locally elected representatives and their social and economic partners, will take over the strategic regional component of the statutory development plan. In short, the Regional Assemblies will cease to exist in their current form and its all planned to happen by March 2010 !

Yet reaction to all this has been limited, even from the Regional Assemblies themselves. Many commentators have already remarked on this. Tim Marshall for example, has called it 'a curiously muted reaction' to proposals for a significant transfer of plan making powers (Planning 31 August '07 and Town & Country Planning September '07). The RTPI has suggested that this is a mechanism for circumventing what the Government sees as 'uncomfortable' regional decision making, whilst the South East Regional Assembly has expressed concerns about local authorities being 'side-lined'. Others however, have seen the proposals in a more positive light, as some kind of response to the Assemblies' poor decision making on big issues such as the provision for housing growth and to the existence of too many 'overlapping' regional policy making bodies. It is certainly true that there has been an uneasy

relationship between the spatial and economic regional strategies and the TCPA for example has seen advantages in removing 'the overlap'. The CBI is delighted because it has always argued that the RDA's should do the regional planning. Also pleased, dare one say it, are those local authorities who have seen their Regional Assembly and its RSS as at best an irritant and at worst, top-down heavy handedness.

Here in the South West, the Regional Assembly appears to have quietly acquiesced to the proposals. The members are said to have 'responded positively, acknowledging that there is always a need to make sure that decision making and structures are fit for purpose in order to deliver what the region needs' (SWRA Newsletter September '07). We are told that work is in progress to ensure the seamless and effective transfer of regional planning, transport and housing functions to the RDA and there appear to have been similar responses from Assemblies in other regions.

At the same time, there are significant underlying concerns about government centralisation and a local democratic deficit. The SWRA for example states that the transference of key regional functions 'must be accompanied by sufficient safeguards and democratic scrutiny by local authorities and [social & economic] partners of draft plans produced'. The West Midlands Assembly has asked the Government to clarify what it means by the 'stronger roles for local government in scrutiny and strategic decision making' which have been promised and has expressed concern that the role of other partners appears to be non-existent in this respect. (WMRA web-site 2007).

The origins of these proposals can be found firstly in Gordon Brown's 'Governance of Britain' constitutional reform agenda, which talks about such things as 'empowering regions and localities' (DCLG News Release 17 July '07) but more particularly to the Treasury Review of Sub-National Economic Development (SNR), the results of which were first announced last July and confirmed, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, by Alistair Darling in October. This review examined how to further improve the effectiveness and efficiency of existing sub-national [i.e.

regional] structures in England and options 'going forward' that might maximise value for money and deliver changes 'on the ground' to strengthen economic growth and deliver regeneration and neighbourhood renewal. So not much here then about spatial planning! That dimension is however identified, tucked away in Chapter 2 of the Housing Green Paper also published last July.

Here we see evidence of a distinctly Barker Review take on things and apparent Government frustration with the new housing provisions as set out in the respective draft Regional Spatial Strategies. Indeed the Chapter is titled 'Delivery without needless delay - continuing planning reform' and gets straight down to the issue of the regional planning process. It is suggested that the current round of RSS is 'likely to fall short of meeting expectations in household growth and housing need'.

This sweeping statement fails to acknowledge the complex mix of regional, sub-regional and local factors which 'on the ground' have had to be taken into account by the Regional Assemblies. It might also be noted that a significant element of this 'delay' has been due to central government processes. At the time of writing, not one of the eight RSS's for the English regions outside London has yet been adopted as development plan policy and in four cases more than two years have elapsed since the Draft RSS was submitted to government. (the South West may yet turn out to be one of the fastest turn-rounds at 20 months and counting !)

The Green Paper goes on to call for 'an early review of housing provision in RSS's', using a strengthened evidence base, which turns out to mean ranges of housing provision prescribed from above by central government. It is also suggested that in future central government will specify an economic growth objective for each region and 'require' strategic spatial policies to reflect this as well as the prescribed housing provision. Such an approach might certainly make the review process quicker by effectively removing much of the local 'on the ground' debate about such matters and thus disempowering regions and localities. Rather ignoring this, the Green Paper goes on to state

that the full involvement of local authorities and other stakeholders is still expected. There is no doubt that the RDA's everywhere, have, since their creation in 1999, become increasingly key drivers of regional change and the many hundreds of millions of pounds of central government funds which they have dispensed have resulted in environmental, social and economic benefits. At the same time, there appears to have been very limited acknowledgement of the equally valuable role played 'on the ground' by the Assemblies, and their constituent local planning authorities, whose work goes back well before 1999. It was the South West Regional Planning Conference, set up in 1989, which provided the strategic spatial planning groundwork for RPG 10 and subsequently the RSS.

The Government, growing impatient with the perceived failure of the current democratically based regional planning mechanisms, centred on the Regional Assemblies, to produce policies of which it approves, is about to change these mechanisms radically. The changes appear to have been decided upon even before we have the first round of RSS in place. Unless the Government is able to convince us otherwise, the conclusion must be that 'economic development and its agent the RDA rules and local powers of scrutiny and decision making, at the strategic level at least, will be reduced to tokenism'. If this is the case, why have the Regional Assemblies either individually or collectively raised such little opposition to all of this.

Geoff Walker
UWE



RTPI SW CONFERENCE JANUARY 2008

Bright sunny Friday, National Maritime Museum in Falmouth, one of the most spectacular restaurant vistas in the country, overlooking the harbour, what better venue to start the Branch conference programme for 2008? Could the conference contents live up to the venue? The answer to both questions was a resounding yes.

Affordable housing has to be one of the major issues for planners in the South West, with average house prices up 206% in the last decade and the highest regional net population gain from migration. With an audience from a range of professionals involved in housing provision five speakers made interesting contributions to the topic.



Matthew Taylor MP

We all know that timing is a critical factor in planning and it applies to the micro scale of conference organising as much as anything else. Last Autumn the Prime Minister asked Matthew Taylor, Lib Dem MP for Truro and St Austell, to conduct a study into Rural Economy and Affordable Housing and with such a conference on his doorstep, on a Friday, we managed get Matthew to come and address the conference. Such was the enthusiasm with which the baton was taken up, meant that some contingency planning

of the days proceedings were necessary to rearrange the afternoon programme.

Matthew sees sustainability of the rural economy being closely related to the availability of affordable housing, not least in the South

West where retirement, capital release

and commuters using second homes have driven house prices upwards. Sharing some initial thoughts Matthew suggested that the planning process needs to be clearer, evidenced based and not get bogged down in procedural matters (LDF production in Cornwall has been suffering). Whilst the RSS might concentrate growth on larger settlements he suggested the villages and hamlets have an important role to play. Plenty of scope for a few house in many of the smaller settlements but the communities in these must be brought on side; benefits for locals and out with Nimbyism. Making the larger settlements more attractive might also reduce the desire to move to the countryside; the major expansion of some of the South West's larger towns and cities could set an example of higher quality design and better environments for living.

If you missed the conference you can still get involved with Matthew Taylor's study. He has issued a "call for evidence" and copies of the paper can be obtained from www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/policyimplementation/reformplanningsystem/matthewtaylorreview/. Evidence by 7 March please.

At the outset of the conference Martin Willey (RTPI Senior Vice-President) suggested that planners were under the cosh to sort out the provision of affordable housing as the issues are politically attractive for local councillors. With parts of the South West having a salary to house price ratio of 19 to 1 Martin suggested some imagination would be necessary if targets were to be achieved. He suggested a range of issues to be addressed, not only meeting the targets but how to keep property in perpetuity in the affordable bracket, the provision of home-workplaces, doing deals across local boundaries etc.

Mike Kay (South Somerset Homes) went to the other end of the spectrum concentrating on the sustainability standards now required for all housing and the implications this has for affordable provision. Extolling delegates to visit the Building Research Establishment and look at their examples Mike saw progress being made through greater efficiencies achieved by partnerships between builders, consultants, and tenants and with Housing Associations developing